

Commonalities between Art and Architecture

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Abstract

Artists do not create in a void, their activity is not unmotivated to their times. To have new creativity, progress in thought and in technique must be concurrent. The problem of plastic space is not a problem of content and form, but adopting content to form. The new means of making man dominate nature, involved a complete change in the vision of the spatial world. Problems of the relationship between man and the universe, and between individuals themselves are the problem the Impressionists tackled. Some of them faced the modern problem of the relations between form and light, others faced the problem of the triangulation of space, and still others faced the modern problem of tactile values or the poly-sensorial representation of space.

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Introduction

A work of art is situated in space, but it will not do to say it simply exists in space; a work of art treats space according to its own needs, defines space and even creates such space as maybe necessary to it. In the painting of quattro cento the dissociation between constructed space in depth and picture surface with figures is for the most part not yet overcome. The volume of the bodies inwardly organized and enlivened by a central idea, is in most cases not set in a circular movement. In the quattro cento the linkage of this volume with the space is incomplete. For the human figure there is spiritualization and surface ornamentation, for the space realism and perspective construction in depth. The resolution of this duality, the subordination of masses and space within one central idea is the achievement of the high Renaissance. On the basis of this idealized and normative objectification, the individual object of the classic style was removed formally, in its organization, and physically, in its gestures and expression, from any subjective, purely optical impression. The art is here idealistic but it does not rest on any canon, rather upon fantastic idea, an imaginative idea unsupported by imitation of nature. It is no longer a question of creating a seen object in a new way.

In Mannerist Art the proportions of the limbs can be stretched out of a particular rhythmic feeling of beauty because this was the norm given by nature. This was a distortion of the appearance of an object. Thus there arises a new beauty no longer resting on real measure of the model but rather on an inner artistic reworking on the basis

of harmonic or rhythmical requirements. The relation of this artistic view point is to take an ambiguous, constructed space. In a word for them the problem of three dimensional spaces vanishes. The volumes of the bodies displace the space. A certain effect of depth is achieved through adding up layers of volumes along with an evasion of perspective. In the struggle between picture surface and presentation of depth in space which is of vital importance throughout the whole history of art, this is a particularly a good solution. In such case the space is not adapted to the figures, but is an unreal space, just as the figures.

In the 15th Century the landscape responds to real facts and to effects of depth which is obtained through perspective means but the bodies remained unreal and relatively flat. In anti-classic Mannerism the figures remain plastic and had volume even if they are unreal. Focillon tries to define the various systems of artistic forms in realms of space matter, mind, and time. He mentioned different systems of perspective and the uses of space as limit and environment.

Light

Architectural masses are rigorously determined by the relationship of the parts to each other and the parts to the whole. A building moreover, is rarely a single mass. It is rather a combination of secondary masses and principal masses, and in the art of Middle Ages this treatment of space attains an extraordinary degree of power and variety. The complexity of ornamental forms will threaten its equilibrium and make it seem unsteady and flimsy. Light cannot rest upon it without being broken apart, and when subjected to such incessant alternators, the architecture wavers, fluctuates, and loses all meaning. The space that possesses evenly on a continuous mass is as immobile as that mass itself. But the space that penetrates the voids of the mass, and is invaded by the proliferation of its reliefs is mobile. Whether examples are taken from baroque art, this architecture of movement assumes the qualities of wind, of flame, and of light, it moves within a fluid space. In primitive Romanesque art, the architecture of stable masses defines a massive space.

Light is treated not so much as an inert factor as a living element, fully capable of entering into and of assisting the cycle of metamorphoses. Light not only illuminates the internal mass, but collaborates with the architecture to give it its needed form. Light is form of tranquillizing it or giving it vivacity. Light is form since it is admitted to the nave only after it has been patterned by the colored network of the stained glass windows. To what realm, to what region in space do these structures, situated between heaven and earth, and pierced through and through by light belong? The flat but limitless expanse of the windows, the images, shifting, transparent, disembodied, and yet held firmly in place by bands of lead, the illusory mobility of volumes which despite the stubborn rigidity of

architecture, expand with the depth of shadows, the interplay of columns, the overhang of many-storied, diminishing naves. The builder, does not set apart and enclose a void, but instead a certain dwelling place of forms and in working upon space, he models it, within and without, like a sculptor. He is a geometrician in the drafting of the plan, a painter in the distribution of visual effects, and a sculptor in the treatments of masses.

Sculpture

Sculpture may suggest the content of life and its inner articulation, but it is obvious that its design does not suggest to us anything resembling a void. Sculpture is not an envelope. It bears down with all the weight of density. The interplay of the internal component parts has no importance save as it comes up to and affects the surfaces, without compromising them as the outward expression of the volumes. The proportions are a quantitative definition of the relationship between the parts. The modeling translates for us the interpretation of light. The same thing applies to the profiles of sculpture, a collection of flat images, whose sequence elicits the concept of the solid only because the exigency already lies within us.

Ornamental space is the most characteristic expression of the high middle Ages in the western world. It is an illustration of a philosophy that renounces development in favor of involution that surrenders the concrete world for the frivolities of fantasy. The theory of the relationship between the relief of form and the depth of space was sought out through successive experiments and important variations. Giotto's figures take their place as simple and beautiful blocks within a strictly limited environment, analogous to the workshop of a sculptor.

Mannerist Art has involved the psychology of art and artist and the relation between art and neurosis. Are not Michelangelo's statues of slaves a kind of caricature? Are not Bernini's sketches and models for his grandiose Baroque sculptress and ugliness? The caricaturist seeks for the perfect deformity. Others of these caricatures a naturalistic portrait sketch of a vivid and fleeting expression suffices to produce a comic effect when placed on a dwarfed body. Even the greatest master, Daumier (1810-1879), did not refrain from employing it in his portrait of the head of Louis Napoleon is fitted upon a dwarflike body. In those times this was only made to ridicule types rather than to reshape an individual as a type. It is not by accident that simplification and reduction to a formula became part of the tradition of caricature. They wanted to look for a solution to the development of representational skill I suggest, for here we are in the field of psychology. In a text attributed to Aristotle himself, that to read the character of a man when only had to trace in his physiognomy the features of the animal which he resembled most. The bulldog face would betray stubbornness. Psychologists have no difficulty in

defining what the caricaturist has done, yet at bottom caricature to renew infantile pleasure. The essence of the caricaturist's can be viewed in the historical position in a wider perspective. Michelangelo's unfinished marble blocks of the slaves are more admirable than his finished statues, because they are nearer to the state of conception.

Projection of an inner image

The work of art is then considered as a projection of an inner image. It is not its proximity to reality but its nearness to the artist's psychic life. Here is the beginning of the development which culminates in the attempts of expressionism to make art a mirror of the artist's conscious or unconscious and in which the artists assert the priority of imagination over lavish imitation. In many periods of the past the ornamental border had given scope to the artist's free play of imagination. Albrecht Durer said "He, who wants to create DreamWorks, must make a mixture of all things". Often the play with meaning, the ambiguity of form, becomes a predominant feature in these fantastic works.

The new role assigned to the artist's fantasy life manifests itself in caricature than in other spheres of art. Visual images play a different part in our mind. The visual image may impose itself upon the mind as perception. It presupposes a belief in the identity of the sign with the thing signified. Artists are well aware at all times of their magic power to cast this spell of transformation on the memory picture. This does not mean that a belief in image magic was always consciously held in classical antiquity but it does mean that the best caricatures do claim equality with great portraits. The great portrait has more dimensions; it continues to stimulate responses, reinterpretations, and thus processes of recreation.

In artistic perception, there exists another dynamic tension between surface and depth perception. We saw how in some primitive the unconscious symbolism art hidden in the images that may distort the realistic appearance of the outlines instead of making the outlines follow a realistic imitation of the real thing. The real work of art is to represent things of external reality. Gestalt formations such as geometrical shapes, most important of all, have the quality of externality; that is of their separateness from the internal world of the mind.

Introspectionism

The nineteenth-century psychology of Introspectionism discovered that our perception of the real things eliminated from consciousness the various distortions which the form, tone, color, of the real things undergoing to the changes in their illuminations, or our viewing angle, it stands to reason that to find our bearings in the world would become extremely difficult and liable to error if we had consciously to discount the ever changing

distortions of form and tone, in order to arrive at the unchanging constant properties of the real things which alone are biologically significant for our reality adjustment. As it is the constancies of form automatically repress the thing free distortions and give us instead an immediate awareness of the constant reality which contain little, if any precise form experience. As a rule we are not conscious of this lack. Perspective gave painting the dimensional depth. Baroque used the transition between full light and deep shade in order to mold the solid things in the round; the shimmering open air colors of Impressionism are said to produce a feeling of the empty space of atmosphere, extending between the depicted scene and the onlooker. Here the creative achievement of art represented an advance in the scientific and plastic representation of the external world. We hardly see an object without some perspective distortion of its constant form.

The constancy of form automatically discounts all the distortions of the real constant form. Hence the repression of the distortions represents a very important step forward in making perception serviceable for recognizing reality in our normal experience of reality we do not perceive the true tone values instead, the constancy of tone automatically discounts the distortions of tone values of black and white and we perceive at once the real the constant tone values of black and white. The Introspectionists psychologists placed a perforated screen between the observer and the two objects so that only spots (cut out from the surfaces of a black book and white paper) remained visible through the viewing holes. As the different illumination of the book and the paper is then no longer apparent it can no longer be automatically discounted by the constancy of tone. As soon as the screen is withdrawn and the observer is again made aware of the differences in illumination, the suspended constancy of tone springs back into automatic action and forces the observer to see again only the constant local tones of black and white. Hence the naïve painter before the advent of perspective reproduced on the canvas the constant form and tone of an object which he actually saw, not he merely knew to exist. The customary distinction between perceptual types of painting which reproduces the actual perception and conceptual type which reproduces the object as it ought to look according to our knowledge of its constant properties is inexact because it does not take into account the possible dynamic changes which have taken place in our perception since the Renaissance. The realistic artists, by their successive discoveries have so altered our thing perception that we wrongly take our present awareness of perspective.

As the artist does not care for the real properties of the things. He is able to overcome the various constancies of form, tone and colors, to destroy in fact his thing perception and bring up the biologically less relevant distortion of perspective. Modern art brought the progressive thing distortion into the open. It maybe that there existed no sharp distinction between the mental imagery of real things and the imagery connected with true ideas

except the degree of their abstraction. The scientist, like the artist, contemplates in his creation vision only his own internal world, but from this internationalized vision the scientist returns triumphantly with a new law of nature which claims to interpret the external world in a new way. The whole concept of law of nature was recognized as superfluous.

Primitive man makes nature a part of primitive society. The objects of nature behave like members of his community and obey the same basic law. We understand now why the artist who dares to break the laws of art will evoke moral indignation and even risk prosecution. So the medieval man's first interest to explaining the external world was a great quest for guilt. Future depth psychological research might perhaps succeed to link up again the irrational happenings within our unconscious mind with their physiological objective basis and might thus establish a somewhat more complex relationship between our perception experiences and outer reality assumed at present. For the time being the depth psychology of perception must lend support to the skepticisms of idealistic philosophies which doubts the objectivity of beauty.

Beauty and Realism

Themes of modern art-criticism are the interaction of science and technology. Unfortunately much of the social criticism of the arts has been viewed in the context of the Industrial Revolution. A painter is directly affected by the horrors of that which is hellish in the painting and writing of the time. The desire to give some kind of cultural overtone to machine-made products explains the appearance of industrial classicism, which is a curious evidence of cultural lag in the arts. Inappropriate and outdated forms are imposed upon machine-made utensils, which thus become artistic anachronisms. Peasant art was swept aside and replaced by sophisticated industrial design. Goods which had previously been made from start to finish by a single craftsman, were now produced in a series of stages by different specialists, and at each stage this division of functions improved dexterity and saved time. The most serious division was that between designing and making. Once design became self-conscious through being made by a specialized task of the artist, who did not himself actually work at the wheel or bench or lathe, the taste of the craftsman was inevitably undermined. Nevertheless, the inventiveness of the worker was now confined to the technical problems of execution. More important was the drive for a continuous supply of original designs which were produced by artists employed as wage earners in the factory itself.

Michelangelo stated with frankness that art being un-teachable should not be taught in an academy. It is only task can be to give elementary tuition in painting, modeling and carving, and an introduction into those subjects of general education without which no

great art is possible. A convinced Impressionist such as Whistler could say exactly the same “I don’t teach art; with that I cannot interfere; but I teach the scientific application of paint and brushes”, and more bluntly by Edward Lear and Ferdinand Waldmüller: “I wish the whole thing were abolished, for as it is now it is disgraceful; Waldmüller; “As it has been found that the purpose of these institutions has not been achieved, there is not the slightest reason for retaining what is recognized as utterly useless. No more academic teaching then; let the State abolish the academies, and release all art training entirely”.

Romanticism joining hands with the Realists and the Impressionists infighting the same academies that had been triumphantly recognized by earlier great representatives of Romanticism. In explaining this paradoxical situation one must consider this in that most complex phenomenon, the Romanticism of the late 18th & 19th Centuries, a reflected ideal of medieval community spirit was linked up with a new cult of un-thwarted personality, but liberalism was progressing at a more alarming speed. So, within the Romantic Movement, individualism prevailed. Only the Royal Academy was able to keep its original character for another century sharing with Paris the reputation of being the most reactionary of European academies. Roger Fry made a few vivacious remarks on the Ecole des Beaux Arts at the time when he was young. We read of the “dirty brown plaster casts”, and the “dusty foxy and flyblown copies of Italian pictures and frescos” kept in what he calls “the most admirable equipped of these laboratories for inoculation against art”. Since public compulsion remained absent in matters of art, Education and Art had only one wish: to become completely free, was it not right to plead for the abolition of academies?

Conclusion

Renaissance painting succeeded in formulating a new geometric conception of space, and this space was gradually destroyed by painters in the 19th Century, then reformulated in Cubism. Francastel shows that the Renaissance perspective was a form of myth as well as a system of geometry; it contained irreconcilable premises and methods, and these irreconcilables became increasingly apparent as the Impressionists, again under the influence of the science and philosophy of their day, attempted to find some way of representing their altered vision of reality. The impressionist was more than a new method of painting; it was a new comprehension of the universe, reflecting a change in the total social technological and philosophic situation of man in the modern world, and in the relation between art and society, treating Impressionism as an aspect of the revolutions in a Post-Renaissance order. Impressionism left many problems unsolved, since it was an art in which there remained a conflict between style and perception. The Cubists resolved many of these conflicts and in the process created a new space unlike

Renaissance space. In this sense the Impressionists were the real primitives in modern art.

The common aim of the painters in the 20th Century was to destroy the Renaissance plastic space for being a permanent datum supplied by experience. The Renaissance inventors of the perspective treatment of space are creators of an illusion. Besides, they differ among themselves about imposing upon their contemporaries a ready acceptance of this illusionism. Their new space is a blend of geometry and mythical inventions in which technical theory has no greater share than personal and collective beliefs. Originally this space evolved from extensive speculation upon light as well as upon the relative position of objects in nature.